

“Evening Show with Sid Kim” on TBS FM radio of Nelson Auner and Joanne Mills, NSLI-Y students in Korea, shortly after their arrival in Seoul in July 2009.

Every year the U.S. State Department selects a language that is becoming more significant globally and recruits teenagers to send them to the country of that language. The program is called Korea Discovery for US students. And on the phone we have two of 38 lucky participants who are picked out of nearly 400 applicants. And, the first person on the phone is Joanne Mills. Joanne, are you there?

Joanna: Yes.

Sid: Joanna, welcome to the show. Why do you think you were picked to come to Korea in the first place?

Joanna: It's kind of difficult to say because, even though they gave us the essay topics, there wasn't really a criteria that I could see. It was like everyone try your hardest and try to look the best you can. But, from talking to the other applicants who were chosen, I've noticed that a lot of us have done a lot of community service. We're all pretty active in our high schools. And we're all really interested in Asian languages already. Some of us have already mastered another Asian language and then we have a lot of leadership capabilities.

Sid: So, basically, you're outgoing, you're a leader and you did a lot of community service. It's interesting that you would pick Korea of all places. I know that there are a lot of different countries and languages that high school students are interested in, but usually Korean doesn't pop up often, so why do you personally have an interest in Korean or in Korea?

Joanna: Well, it all actually starts with a general interest in East Asia. I actually take, or took Chinese at my high school for two years and because I've studied so much about China, I also became more interested as well in Korean language. Initially it started with some of the more pop culture things like the music or the dramas or the movies. But, as I began to study more about the culture, not only did the more historic aspects of Korea stand out, but also the beauty of the language. I don't know, but Korean just sounds really pretty to me.

Sid: Well, that's interesting. A lot of foreigners I've heard it said that Korean can sometimes sound like machine gun fire....a lot of hard syllables coming at you.

Joanna: Oh, no I don't feel like that at all. I find it to be a very beautiful language.

Sid: Well, that's good. You mentioned earlier that you watched Korean dramas and you listened to Korean music. So, I mean, that's very interesting to me because I know that you grew up in North Carolina, right?

Joanna: Correct

Sid: So, I don't really equate North Carolina with K-pop and Korean dramas. How did you get into that, I mean, did you have a Korean friend, or?

Joanna: Um, actually, I didn't get many Korean friends until I entered high school. I was home-schooled up through eighth grade. So, really it's all the power of the Internet. I knew some friends and actually my oldest sister who got me into some of the Japanese music and that type of stuff. And I just started doing my own research and the Korean music and the Korean dramas just stood out to me so much more. And I just became super obsessed right away. So, it's really all through the Internet that I found all the dramas and I started purchasing things.

Sid: Alright, so then let me ask you a personal question. Who is your favorite actor or who is your favorite singer?

Joanna: Ooh, I think right now the group Big Bang...

Sid: Of course.

Joanna: ...is my favorite. And then actor, wise maybe Sang gyung-sok

Sid: Chang-geun Sok, Right? Ok got it, got it. You probably just gave the same two answers that a Korean high schooler would have probably give too. So, that's very interesting. Anyway, you're here for a year, right? So, a year and you're going to learn Korean. And where are you going to be? Are you in Seoul?

Joanna: Right now I'm in Seoul. I'm going to be here with all... actually I think it's 37, not sure if it's 37 or 38, with all 37 students in Seoul and we're going to be staying with different host families. And we're going to be taking Korean language classes at Seoul National University.

Sid: Uh hum. Number one university here in Korea.

Joanna: Yes, Seoul National University. And then ..

Sid: Go ahead, sorry.

Joanna: We're also doing a huge amount of other events, like to culturally immerse us, such as like visiting a traditional, er visiting a palace. And then we visited a Buddhist temple already. And we're going to be learning taekwondo. We are going to an adventure amusement park, Lotte World. And then we're going to be doing a bunch of... There is this one event that we are going to do called "mission impossible" where we're going to be getting together with other Korean students and we're going to complete a bunch of tasks, both to...

Sid: Like a scavenger hunt type of thing, right?

Joanna: Yes

Ah interesting. So it looks like you're going to do a lot of fun stuff, as well as educational stuff, maybe in a year or so you can come back on the show and we can conduct this interview in Korean. How's that?

Joanna: I would love to.

Sid: Well, Joanna, I hope you have a great time and I hope you enjoy your stay here in Korea and you learn a lot about the culture and the language. It was nice talking to you and if Nelson is next to you, I'd like to talk to him too.

Joanna: Of course. Here he is.

Sid: Thanks. And bye-bye. Hey, Nelson, are you there?

Nelson: Yes

Sid: Hi Nelson, how are you doing?

Nelson: I'm great.

Sid: First of all, welcome to Korea and I'm going to ask you one of the same questions I just asked Joanna. How did you get interested in Korea and Korean in the first place?

Nelson: Yeah, about four years ago I wanted to go to a summer camp and there was a large scholarship for the Korean language camp in Minnesota. So I won the scholarship and I was able to go to camp and I had so much fun and I liked the language a lot, so I went back every year.

Sid: I see, so you've already learned the language, right? A little bit?

Nelson: I'm not fluent. I went for two weeks for the first two years and the next two years I went for a month and got credit at my school and I learned a lot there.

Sid: Annyonghaseo? Manaso panggapsumnida. (Hello, how are you? I'm very pleased to meet you)

Nelson: Chodo manaso panggapsumnida (I am also pleased to meet you).

Sid: Alright! Very good, very good. So, you're going to be here for a year, learning Korean, learning about the culture and from what I understand from Joanna, doing all kinds of fun and educational stuff. And I hear you're going to be staying with a Korean family in homestays, so what do you think about that? Any worries? Anything you're looking forward to?

Nelson: Sashirun, nanun sipiwol gaji issokoyo (Actually, I will be here until December).

Sid: Sipiwol gaji? So you're going to be here until December?

Nelson: Ne (yes).

Sid: Ok, so is this your first time in Korea?

Nelson: Yes

Sid: So, what do you think? Is it what you expected from dramas, tv or books or from even Korean friends or teachers or is it different from what you expected?

Nelson: I mean, I'm not a girl, so I don't watch, I don't know, like Korean dramas, but it is way better, way better than I thought it would be. The program is very well organized. And, like today we went to the palace, you know the old palace, we went to Insa-dong...

Sid: Uh huh, Kyongbok-gung and Insa-dong, right?

Nelson: Yeah, like every day we've been doing something really fun. So, it's going to be sad when we go to our host families, because right now we're staying together in a hotel.

Sid: Well, it sounds like a lot of fun, a bunch of high school kids, er are you a high school graduate as well?

Nelson: No, actually I'm going to senior year next year.

Sid: So, you're going to be a senior, is that right?

Nelson: Right

Sid: Well, do you know what, Nelson, welcome to Korea and I'm sure you're going to have a lot of fun and I'm sure you're going to learn a lot of stuff while you're here. When you go back to the States...where are you from, by the way?

Nelson: I'm from Wisconsin.

Sid: Wisconsin? When you go back to Wisconsin tell everybody what a great place it is over here.

Nelson: Oh, I will definitely.

Sid: Ok, well thanks for joining us tonight. We really appreciate it.

Nelson: Yeah, no problem.

Sid: Alright, bye-bye, Nelson.

Nelson: bye

Sid: That was Nelson Auner and Joanna Mills, two of the 38 lucky participants who were picked out of nearly 400 applicants to participate in Korea Discovery for US students.

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